The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

August 8, 1994 Contact: Greg Donley

The 1994 Invitational: Artists of Northeast Ohio
August 31 to October 23, 1994 at The Cleveland Museum of Art

The *1994 Invitational: Artists of Northeast Ohio* continues the format successfully inaugurated in 1991 as a variation on The Cleveland Museum of Art's traditional *May Show*. A small number of established area artists is each represented by a significant number of current works that reveal the breadth, consistency, and importance of their achievements. Curator of Contemporary Art Tom Hinson has chosen works by eight artists: paintings by Craig Lucas of Kent and Catherine Tighe of Barberton; ceramic sculptures by Eva Kwong from Kent; mixed media photographs by Christopher Pekoc of Cleveland; books by Audra Skuodas of Oberlin; textiles by Lilian Tyrrell of Freedom Township; paintings and cut-paper compositions by Mark Howard of Cleveland; and a circular maze of tall grasses installed in the courtyard by Joan Damankos of Cleveland Heights.

The works share what might most aptly be called an embrace of ambiguity. Rather than attempting to "solve" human and aesthetic enigmas, the artists exploit the energy generated by unresolved elements to create art that transcends ambiguity. So while Craig Lucas or Christopher Pekoc deliberately obscure symbols and meanings under layers of paint or collage, they may simultaneously create new meaning by excavating down through the surface to reveal hidden imagery. Eva Kwong's ceramics similarly draw power from the sharp accents of color and texture that emerge as a result of the sculptor's digging through layers of clay and manipulating surface glazes. Catherine Tighe just lets loose with the paint, taking each visual element as it comes, reacting to and drawing inspiration from the unpredictable forms that emerge in the moment.

The more figurative works of Mark Howard, Lilian Tyrrell, and Audra Skuodas deal with human situations—the violence of inner city life, the horror of war, the quest of the individual for spiritual meaning—but none offer easy answers either. Joan Damankos' maze of tall grasses in the outdoor courtyard invites the viewer to participate in a compelling physical manifestation of the artist's quest, wherein the journey has more meaning than the destination. Brief discussions of each artist, adapted from Tom Hinson's catalogue essays, follow in alphabetical order.

11150 EAST BOULEVARD, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106-1797
TEL 216-421-7340 TDD 216-421-0018 FAX 216-421-0411

Joan Damankos

A sculptural installation in the outdoor courtyard

The direct, personal involvement of the viewer inspires Joan Damankos' temporary installations. Many who attended the Museum's 75th anniversary celebration in 1991 will remember *The Way of Pervading Unity,* her installation of a silver mylar "ribbon" straight across the lagoon, connecting the Museum's south steps to Euclid Avenue. This time, she is working with what is perhaps the Museum's second-most-familiar exterior setting, the outdoor courtyard, a favorite spot for sculpture-browsing and outdoor dining.

As she considered the location, Damankos moved toward a desire "to impose on this space an image of simplicity, stillness, and order." Her response is a circular maze about twenty-nine feet in diameter, set in a large open area in the center of the courtyard—her interpretation of the maze at Hever Castle in Kent, England. The hard stone surface of the site required Damankos to build wooden planters, about a foot wide, to define her layout; the maze's hedges are formed of a green grass with a slight purple tinge, which grows about four feet high, and will turn a warm golden hue if there is a frost before the exhibition closes. These uncertain physical changes and tiny bells attached to the grasses add a special living quality to the sculptural installation. At the center, a sculpted hand holds a metal ring.

Mark E. Howard

Four acrylic paintings and ten cut-paper compositions

Five years ago, having produced a body of large screenprinted paintings based on multiple images from newspapers and magazines, Mark Howard felt he had arrived at a natural stopping point. At this time he saw a snowflake cut from paper in a friend's studio window. Intrigued, he began to use this naive technique to make sketches which he could transform into paintings. Folding a sheet of white paper into fourths, he designs a spare, immediate, and engaging arrangement of shapes before cutting the paper. When the sheet is unfolded, the quadrupled imagery often takes on new meaning, more complex and expansive than expected. The drawing is completed by spraying the cutout black and gluing it to a white matte board. He quickly discovered that these sketches were fascinating in their own right.

Howard finds many ideas as he walks around his Cleveland neighborhood of East 38th and Payne, retrieving discarded items—letters, photographs, and other detritus—that provide imagery; headlines and photographs from the press also figure in his arrangements. The flat, repeated patterns in black and white establish the skeletal structure of an image—which is usually dominated by the human form, rendered in a countless variety of attitudes, gestures, and emotions, from benign to chilling.

Eva Kwong

Six ceramic sculptures

Sly wit, intense feeling, and a deft hand mark the ceramic sculptures of Eva Kwong. These works, created over the past two years, combine references to the human body, organic structures, and the landscape. Lately, her largely hand-built pieces have grown to a human scale, which, along with her sculptural use of ceramics, clearly distances her work from the medium's history of functional and domestic associations.

Surfaces vibrate with bright, nonrepresentational markings, the result of numerous layers of colored slips applied, often diagonally, to the surface, which lead the viewer around the object. Her choice of hues tends to be intense and lively, and often there is a slight color shift as one moves around a sculpture. She frequently scratches or carves back into previous strata of slips, revealing a complex buildup of hues on the unfired clay. Some sculptures receive a single firing in a salt kiln, producing a grainy and unevenly glossy surface, while others get a more elaborate treatment—an initial bisque firing, followed by the application of a clear glaze, and then a second firing, which produces an evenly shiny surface. Small bits of color, with their cellular references, provide a dynamic sense of rhythm and energy; the spots and carvings give an irregular, tactile surface.

Craig Lucas

Six large paintings, oil and wax on canvas

Craig Lucas' large canvases are imposing, rhythmic, abstract compositions. The artist's approach—building up striated layers of paint that reveal simple shapes embedded underneath—melds the various painting styles that have influenced him since the mid-1960s. Abstract expressionism provides the intuitive, unplanned application of paint, while minimalism inspires his spare composition and elimination of detail. More recently, he has included recognizable images, as have artists like Susan Rothenberg, Ross Bleecker, and Jonathan Lasker, who share Lucas's current interest in how abstract geometric shapes are created and maintained in memory and how they function symbolically.

Lucas begins by blocking out geometric forms in a single color on the canvas. After completing the underpainting, he begins building up the composition by applying one color at a time over the entire surface. He applies the paint—a luminous mixture of oil and wax—with a silkscreen squeegee and then "combs" it in a vertical direction with custom-made squeegees into whose rubber blades various patterns have been cut. During the process, Lucas often will cut or scrape the paint surface to reveal underlying layers of pattern, color, and image; the narrow channels of color establish a strong tonal rhythm. He suggests a shallow, three-dimensional space by overlapping furrows of color with images that reside on top of or just beneath painted veils of different shades. For the past few years, Lucas also has included subjective or broken contours in his paintings, forcing the viewer to pick out the original image buried under layers of paint. His interest in broken imagery and perception derives from a severe eye injury (in 1990) involving a table saw, which left Lucas seeing double for a long time, a phenomenon that produces different focal planes.

Christopher Pekoc

Twelve small collages of photographic imagery and mixed media

Christopher Pekoc continues his interest in combining photogenerated images and mixed-media collages, with haunting results. Though Pekoc initially found artistic recognition as a painter, he has long relied on the process of collage as a beginning point for his paintings, combining fragmented images clipped from magazine photographs. In the 1970s, he transformed these collaged studies into airbrush paintings; in the 1980s, into large, vibrant pastels. After giving up his studio in 1987, Pekoc began to use collage as his primary means of artistic expression, using small fragments in order to disrupt as little as possible the kitchen where he worked. Searching for a more interesting fastening process than glue, he began using a sewing machine to attach the various elements, including photographic imagery.

Pekoc's compositions are fragmentary, numerous small parts making up a complicated whole. Over time, he has created a compelling inventory of menacing image fragments: hands, eyes, armless torsos, as well as inanimate objects such as thorns, spikes, and broken wings. From the horde of images pinned to his studio wall, he selects various individual elements, spontaneously adding and subtracting to achieve a balance between image and symbol. His use of images of actual individuals' body parts enhances the work's psychological edge. With his inventory of fragments ready, he then sews the various limbs, eyes, torsos, and other elements together with jagged stitches that cannot help but suggest desperate surgeries to repair ragged wounds. He normally shellacs all surfaces, creating in the finished work the effect of an aged manuscript that has suffered—and survived—the ravages of time.

Audra Skuodas

Seven illustrated books

This exhibition is the first comprehensive presentation of Audra Skuodas's books. Seven, created since 1991, have been chosen and are shown in their entirety or through selected pages. Although Skuodas views herself primarily as a painter, she has always used books as an important parallel means of expression, initially, of love for her family. Her first gift to her husband was a book and, later, after the birth of their two children, Skuodas created books for them. Often given on holidays or for other special occasions, the

books began to communicate some of the critical issues, philosophies, attitudes, or points of view she wanted to impart to her children.

She approaches her wider audience with the same intense desire to communicate, to share her curiosity. The texts she incorporates reflect the breadth of her reading, including quotes from scientists and humanists—especially ancient and modern philosophers, chroniclers of myths from various cultures, and thinkers on the cosmos—which serve to amplify, elucidate, or intensify the original story and her visualization of it. Compositionally, the books are richly varied. Earlier books are dominated by boldly colored images, while later works feature more subdued tones; one employs collages of sheet music, cut and woven together and then attached to a sheet of paper containing text.

Skuodas's beautifully crafted books allow her to combine artmaking with inspirational sources to produce an intense, personal, deeply felt union of visual images and written text. Examining a book, the viewer is struck by a sense of hope and personal opportunity, eloquently expressed.

Catherine Tighe

Six large paintings, acrylic on canvas

The large, gestural abstract paintings of Catherine Tighe hit the eye like a splash of cold water. For these works, produced over the past ten months, Tighe has used canvases that measure either six and one-half feet square or six and one-half feet by eight feet. Onto these large, blank spaces, she has applied broad expanses of color spontaneously, without preparatory drawings or preconceived ideas—she prefers to work quickly in order to tap into her subconscious. When making adjustments to this flow of raw markings, colors, and emotions, more often than not Tighe will end up repainting the entire composition in order to maintain an equal, uniform level of spontaneity and openness. She proceeds by reacting to what has come before, establishing a constant dialogue between the painter and the canvas. She is always concerned with achieving a balance between color and space, form and gesture.

The artistic antecedent of Tighe's work is abstract expressionism; she also cites Philip Guston as a source of inspiration. Although abstract, Tighe's work has a strong sense of space, which comes from two sources. Linear shapes act as a foreground element when applied over larger, overlaid forms, creating a stacking effect that can set up a shallow three-dimensional space. Tighe's choice of color often serves to reinforce this feeling of depth or sense of aerial perspective. Her use of light has an atmospheric quality that can range from bright and airy to dense and foreboding in a single canvas, intensifying the ambiguity that is absolutely central to her work.

Lilian Tyrrell

Five large woven tapestries

Technically brilliant, Lilian Tyrrell's large-scale tapestries confront the viewer with some of contemporary society's most provocative political and social events. Filled with luxurious color, these encompassing works demand attention through their seductive beauty and riveting, horrifying subject matter. In 1976 Tyrrell began weaving as a hobby, having no previous formal art training. Her first wall tapestries depicted the rural surroundings of her home in Freedom Township, a small farming community in northeast Ohio. Over a period of time, the work became larger, more intricate, and significantly moodier. A decade later, Tyrrell began her recrent series—the *Disaster Blanket*—which now contains fourteen completed examples. Four of the pieces in this show are from that group, the fifth a just-finished related tapestry.

For her *Disaster Blanket* series, Tyrrell uses images of clear danger and impending doom, presenting memorable pictures from the news media of incidents that elicit intense responses. She contrasts the speed with which a news image is disseminated with the traditional, laborious process of weaving, among the most labor intensive and time consuming of art forms. Her work both plays against and carries on the

tradition of the narrative tapestry that is used to depict a mythical tale or great event. "I consciously chose to use tapestry, an art form most commonly associated throughout history with the politically empowered, to express the problems of political and social unrest," Tyrrell has written. "This is, perhaps, my personal way of dealing with the feelings of helplessness and frustration which can accompany the information one receives with the evening news."

Museum Director Robert P. Bergman, in the catalogue preface, observes that the work selected for the *1994 Invitational* responds "to a range of impulses in the environment, some highly political, others of a more contemplative aesthetic nature. The presentation, designed to feel like eight mini-shows, allows for some concentration on the work of each artist represented.

"Although I am new to the Museum, I approach its relationship to regional and contemporary art with a sense of dedication. The *1994 Invitational* will be part of an ongoing program of exhibitions designed to stimulate contemporary artmaking and its audience."

A full color catalogue of the exhibition will published by August 31. Selected photographs and slides, as well as artists' bios and the exhibition checklist are available on request. Please call 216/421-7340, ext. 263, for information.